

Customer Service Center designed to improve access to Medicaid

The February opening of the first Customer Service Center in Birmingham not only makes the Medicaid application process more user-friendly and accessible, but also represents an important milestone in the Agency's quest to reduce costs and increase efficiency through innovation and technology.

"The centers are part of Beneficiary Services Division's contribution to Medicaid's transformation effort to provide better care—or service—at a lower cost," said Lee Rawlinson, deputy commissioner for Beneficiary Services.

Located in the Palisades Shopping Center, the new office is the prototype for the way Medicaid hopes to serve all applicants by offering a storefront, self-service environment that provides access to computers and copiers along with the staff to assist in the process. The center also provides a drop box for change forms, and a resource center with information about other agencies, programs and referral information that might be of interest to the client.



Computers are available to clients who want to fill out and submit Medicaid applications online.



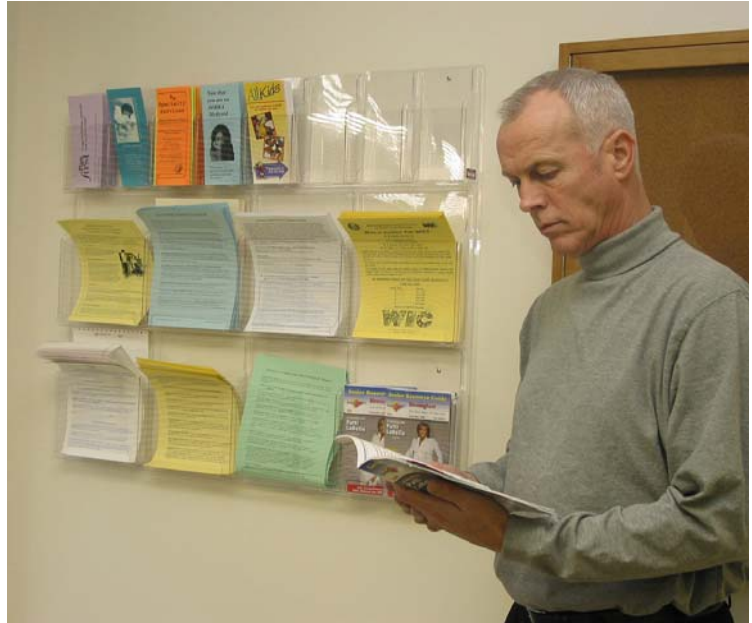
Center staffers answer client questions and make copies of necessary documents.

"For Medicaid, the customer service center concept will ultimately reduce costs and increase efficiency by combining office staff into a single location," Rawlinson said. "Our long term goal is to phase in other service centers across the state, ultimately reducing the number of offices."

With the new accommodations, the agency consolidated five out-stationed SOBRA workers into one location with the Birmingham district office staff. Clerical staff provides customer service, answer phones and make it possible for the SOBRA workers to concentrate on their caseloads. Once the planned IT changes—including electronic case files—are in place there will be space available for consolidating additional staff, she added.

The ultimate goal of the centers, once they are operational throughout the state, is to provide paperless organization and indexing of case files to reduce manual clerical processing and reduce needed storage space while providing immediate access to authorized personnel to access the records.

Clients can use the computers to find answers to commonly asked questions or submit an application on line through the web portal, Rawlinson said. They reap the benefits with faster eligibility determination, fewer lost documents, shorter wait times for telephone responses and office visits, and a reduction in complaints about the system.



David Tankersley, manager of the Birmingham District Office, checks out one of the pamphlets available in the center's resource wall. Clients visiting the customer service center can find information on a variety of agencies and programs.